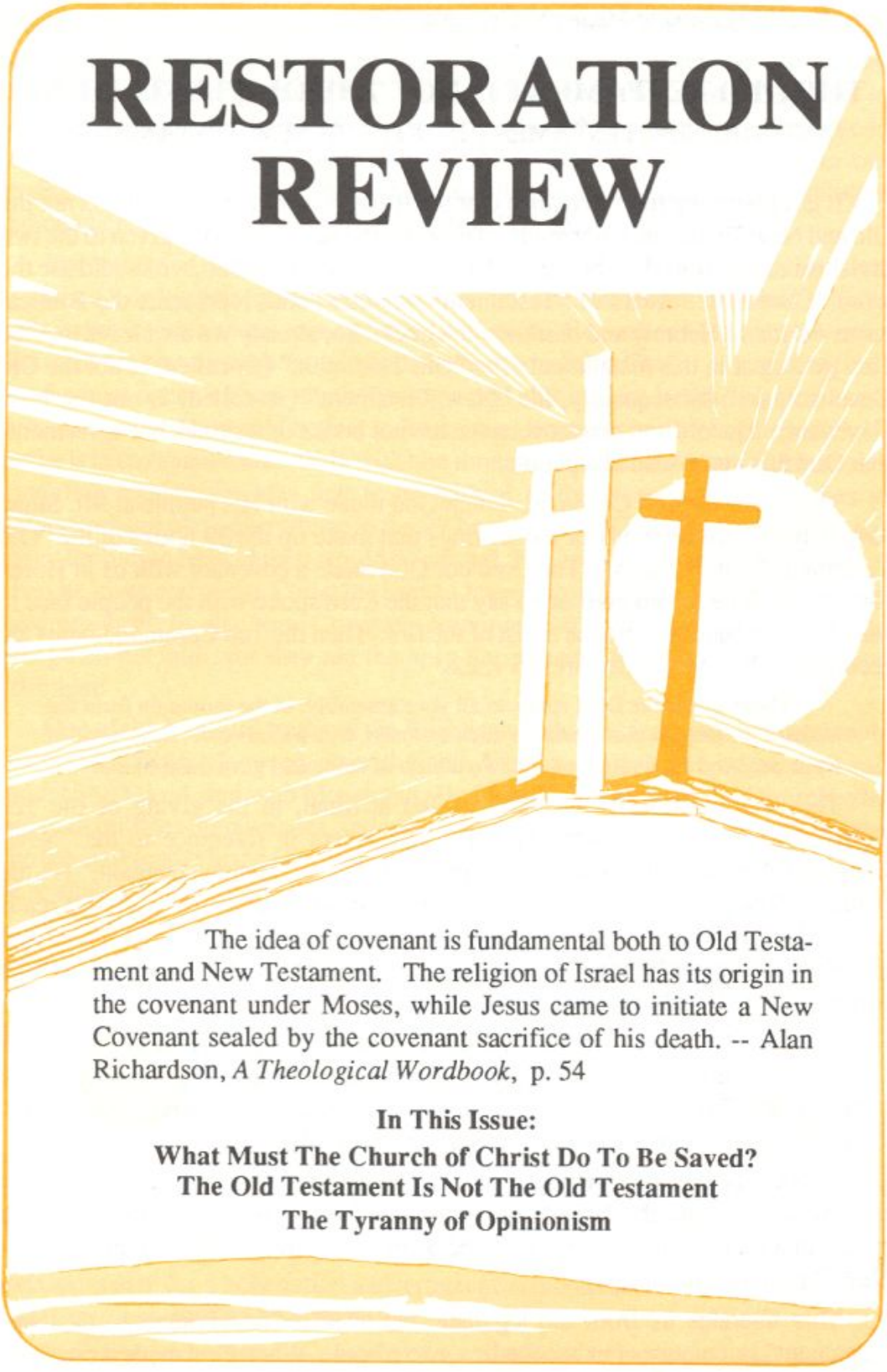
RESTORATION REVIEW



The idea of covenant is fundamental both to Old Testament and New Testament. The religion of Israel has its origin in the covenant under Moses, while Jesus came to initiate a New Covenant sealed by the covenant sacrifice of his death. -- Alan Richardson, *A Theological Wordbook*, p. 54

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . No. 7

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS NOT THE OLD TESTAMENT
(AND THE NEW TESTAMENT IS NOT THE NEW TESTAMENT)

It is a liberating truth to realize that the Bible you hold in your hand is not the Old and New Testaments, not really. Those are the names we have given to the two divisions of the Bible, but they are in fact misnomers. First of all, we should use the word "Covenant" instead of "Testament," for that better represents the Biblical terms *berith* in Hebrew and *diatheke* in Greek. So, already we are closer to what I am getting at in this installment: The "Old Testament" (so-called) is not the Old Covenant, and, subsequently, the "New Testament" (so-called) is not the New Covenant. The old and new covenants are not books or writings but agreements that God has made with His people.

There was the Old Covenant, which God made with His people at Mt. Sinai, long before there were any of the writings that make up the 39 books of the "Old Testament." Dt. 5:2 says, ''The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb (or Sinai)." The record goes on to say that the Lord spoke with the people face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. Then the Ten Commandments are recorded. Then Moses declares in v. 22:

> These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

This was the (Old) Covenant, ratified at Sinai, in the giving of the Ten Commandments, but it wasn't called "Old" except in reference to the "New" Covenant that came through Christ: "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). This does not mean that the books of the "OT" would vanish or no longer be relevant, but that the covenant itself that God made with Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai would end.

The New Covenant superseded the Old in that we now have fellowship with God through Christ. This became a reality on the day of Pentecost when people were baptized into Christ—into a new agreement, a new relationship, a new community. This was before there were such writings as we call the "NT."

So, strictly speaking, what we call the Old Testament is really the Old Covenant Scriptures, and the New Testament is the New Covenant Scriptures. This means that they are documents produced by the Old Covenant community and the New Covenant community.

This liberates us from the legalistic notion that "faithfulness to the New Testament" is a matter of exact obedience to a book. When God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai, both parties were to be faithful, always a covenantal condition. But this did not mean that the people had to understand and obey everything in the 39 books making up the "OT," which did not even then exist. They were to be faithful to God and not go after false gods, which they were hardly ever able to do. In like manner, being faithful to the New Covenant is being true to our relationship to Christ, which does not necessarily require an exact understanding of and obedience to a collection of documents called the NT.

Recently in a Church of Christ—and this was unusual for one of our churches!—I heard a drug addict give a testimonial of his faith. He told how he had sold his body in prostitution to get money for his addiction. He praised God for delivering him from his sins through faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. It was beautiful! But the man doesn't know much theology, and at this point in time he may know little of the NT. He would be lost in Romans or Revelation. But he knows Christ and he is in covenant relationship with him through faith and baptism. To lay on this struggling brother the idea that to be faithful to the New Covenant he has to understand and obey everything in the 27 books of the NT would be a burden too heavy for him to bear. And it would be wrong! He is faithful to the New Covenant when he loves and obeys Christ the best he knows how. In time the Scriptures that were produced by the New Covenant community (the church) will deepen and strengthen his faith, for they are the holy Scriptures. But they are not the New Covenant!

One of the beautiful truths of the Bible is that the God it reveals is a covenant-making God. He made covenants with Noah, Abraham (which was repeated to Isaac and Jacob), David, and with Moses and all of Israel. It is always God Himself who makes or initiates the covenant, and it is always attended by a blessing or a promise. The basic covenant in the aT Scriptures was the one given at Sinai, which included these special promises for Israel:

> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex.19:4-5).

The people accepted the terms of the covenant when they responded with: “Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord” (Ex. 19:8). The promise to Israel, if they kept the covenant, is that they would be God’s special people above all other nations, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Since Israel violated the covenant, over and over again, these promises were never fully realized, and God’s plan for a holy nation and a royal priesthood had to find fulfillment in a New Covenant, ratified by Christ.

The promise in the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:9-17) was universal, everlasting, and unconditional: Never again would the earth be destroyed by a flood of water. The rainbow was given as a sign. The promise in the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:8-18;17:1-14) was both land and descendents. Circumcision was the sign. The covenant with Abraham was renewed again and again in the generations that followed. Then came the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, which was the basic covenant in that it centered in the giving of the Ten Commandments and the actual creation of the covenant community. Its sign was sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood.

The covenant with David promised an everlasting kingdom. The sign was that God’s mercy would never be taken from David as it was from Saul (2 Sam. 7:12-17). The promise of the New Covenant in Christ was the remission of sins and the indwelling Spirit, God’s continuing presence, and the sign was baptism (Acts 2:38).

When we ask why the God of heaven in all His holiness would choose to make covenants with sinful man, we have no answer except that God is love. God has power but the Bible never says that God is power. God has wisdom, but it never says that God is wisdom. God is love! is the great declaration of the nature of God, and that is why he is a covenant-making God. God takes the initiative. While man is of course to respond, it is God who, as “the Hound of Heaven,” pursues man so as to bring him close to Himself. This is expressed in one of the great words in the OT Scriptures, *hesed*, God’s covenant love, which is translated as His lovingkindness or as His mercy.

When finally in Jer. 31:31 it is foretold that God will make a New Covenant with His people, there were to be two things that would be significantly different. While in the covenant with Israel the law was written upon tables of stone, in the New Covenant it would be written upon their hearts and minds. This means that inner response would replace outward demand. They would obey God by “second nature” and because of their love for God rather than because they had to.

The other distinction of the New Covenant is puzzling if not incredible, for it implies that teaching would no longer be necessary: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me, from the

least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34).

Since those of us who are part of the New Covenant community believe that we continue to need teaching and to teach, we may conclude that the prophet's vision reaches beyond where we are presently. The time may come when every Tom, Dick, and Harry will know God's will without having to be taught, something intuitive perhaps, but we are not there yet.

The coming of the New Covenant also emphasizes the great promise, "I will be their God and they shall be My people (Jer. 31:33). While this promise was identified with the New Covenant, we can think of it as basic to all the covenants God has made with His people. That is why He made covenants, because He is our God and He wants us to be His people—and to behave as if we were His people! This is the point of covenant-making. God shows his mercy, His covenant love, by being our God. We respond by being His people and conducting ourselves accordingly. Therein has been the problem all along, that God's people hardly ever conduct themselves as if they are His own special people. This is why the prophets were forever condemning the people for not keeping the covenant. While God was always faithful, Israel did not act as if they were a covenant community. Do we Christians do a better job of behaving as a covenant people than did ancient Israel?

In concluding this I am left wondering in have made myself clear as to the vital distinction between the Old Covenant and the writings (39 books) produced by the Old Covenant community—and subsequently the difference between the New Covenant and the Scriptures produced by the New Covenant (church) community. It appears to be very difficult for us to see that what we call the "New Testament" is not really the New Testament (Covenant). The word "Testament" is the Latin for "Covenant." To say that the "New Testament" is not the New Testament seems threatening to people, and they suppose it to be heresy.

I have searched for an illustration, and I find one in another kind of covenant, the marriage agreement. When a man and a woman are joined in holy matrimony they have made a covenant with each other and with God, and that is why it is so serious to be unfaithful. They may be married a half century or longer, but the covenant was made when they first married. In the meantime they might write love letters to each other during times of separation. These letters might be collected into a volume. Would those "Love Letters" be the covenant between them? Of course not, for the covenant was the agreement they made when they got married. The "Love Letters" are products of their covenantal relationship. Those letters might point back to the covenant and draw values from it, but they would not be the covenant itself.

That is what the OT and NT writings are—love letters, history, prophecy, wisdom, psalms—documents produced by God covenant community. But the covenant itself was made at Sinai (OT) and Pentecost (NT).

This distinction disentangles us from a lot of legalistic thinking about the Bible. Once this distinction dawns on us we will not accuse people of being unfaithful to the New Testament when they do not agree with our interpretations. We will see that one is faithful to the Covenant when he is loyal to his commitment to Jesus Christ, and this can be the case when his understanding of the Bible is less than perfect. One might be wrong about a lot of things and yet be right in her relationship with Jesus Christ in the New Covenant.—*the Editor*

People are God's language!

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THE TYRANNY OF OPINIONISM

> *Believing an opinion never saved anyone. and disbelieving an opinion never damned anyone.*—Alexander Campbell

That pungent quotation sets the stage for some things I want to say about opinion. I also want to make use of Campbell's reference to "the tyranny of opinionism."

It may appear at the outset that we are disparaging opinion, which, of course, we must not do since much of our presumed "knowledge" is opinion. Most of what we believe is really opinion, or so it would seem from Webster's definition: "a belief not based on absolute certainty or positive knowledge but on what seems true." How much do we believe or know with "absolute certainty"? Webster says that all else is opinion. He adds this to his definition: "opinion applies to a conclusion or judgment which, while it remains open to dispute, seems true or probable to one's mind."

Opinions are not tyrannical because they are opinions, but when they are elevated from "what seems true" to being "absolute certainty." Tyranny is also due to an unyielding attitude of "You have to see it my way or else," which makes tyranny of opinionism a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal problem. There is a big difference between having an opinion and being opinionated. Tyranny begins not with an opinion but with being pushy about an opinion.

Opinions grow out of facts. We will all agree that George Washington was the first president of the United States, for that is a matter of fact, what Webster calls absolute certainty. No opinion here, for we are dealing with a fact. But when one concludes that Washington was the greatest president he has drawn an opinion. He may be able to make a strong case for his conclusion, and he may be right, but he must realize that his conclusion is an opinion and not a fact, and therefore open to dispute. Others may believe that Lincoln or Jefferson was the greatest president, or someone else, and make just as strong a case.

Facts are truths, something said or done. Opinions are judgments drawn from facts. This means that opinions are necessary for the living of these days. It is in drawing opinions that make life work—deciding whom to marry, what career to pursue, what food to eat, clothes to wear, books to read, friends to make, and all the rest of life. We make the best "educated guess" we can, which is what a good opinion is, about a thousand things in life. We seldom have the luxury of dealing with what Webster calls "absolute certainty." All else is opinion—deciding the best we can with the facts available to us.

Since opinions are not highly esteemed we sometimes call them by some euphemism, such as convictions. It is the other guy that has opinions, while we have convictions! But convictions are no more than deeply-held opinions. So with matters of faith or things we strongly believe. They are still matters of opinion—as distinguished from matters of fact (knowledge).

This means that theology and most all thinking about religion is opinion. That is why we have to give careful thought to the old motto that all parties accede to: "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love." While we all accept the merit of this motto, we cannot agree on what are matters of faith over against what are matters of opinion. What is a matter of faith to one is a matter of opinion to another. We might solve this dilemma by recognizing that most all of our thinking about religion is opinion.

That is why the motto would be better if it said: "In essentials (or matters of *the* faith), unity; in non-essentials (opinions, methods, and personal preferences), liberty; in all things, love."

This implies that only the basic facts of the Christian faith are essential, which could be described as matters of *the* faith, as distinguished from matters of faith (scruples or opinions).

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Lord of glory is a fact of both Scripture and history. It is not an opinion. It is a statement of fact that one either accepts or does not accept. It is an essential part of *the* faith. To delve into the deeper dimensions of that

proposition and draw deductions about the meaning of the Sonship and Lordship of Christ would be theology—opinion—which might or might not be true. Such theology is important and we *should* theologize. But we should not tyrannize!

> There is a vast difference in the understanding of "Jesus is Lord" of a derelict off the street and a sophisticated theologian. But when both believe that *proposition* and take it to heart they believe the one essential thing. The derelict may never be able to theologize about Jesus Christ, except to share his faith in very simple terms, but he doesn't have to. It is not essential. And yet we value the conclusions of the theologian, for he deepens our faith and improves our understanding. The basics of the faith are essential to being; theology and doctrine contribute to well-being.

Our pioneer father Thomas Campbell dealt with this distinction in his *Declaration and Address.* One proposition reads as follows:

> That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are *not* formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

By inferences and deductions Campbell means opinions (theology!). He grants that such theological opinions may well be true, but even so they cannot be imposed upon others until they come to see for themselves that they are true.

Campbell goes on to say, "Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church."

This is the context in which Alexander Campbell came to refer to the tyranny of opinionism. It it tyrannical to bind our opinions upon others as terms of communion. But both men held that well -studied opinions or deductions have their place. They belong to the "after and progressive edification of the Church." They are a matter of education in the school of Christ where those enrolled are in different grades. Our former derelict brother may not get beyond the first grade, and that is all right. No deduction or opinion of someone at an advanced level will be imposed upon him. That is Christian grace.

It remains to be said that in all our parties in the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches we have been less than faithful to Thomas Campbell's charge. We *have* imposed our opinions upon others as tests of fellowship, whether in reference to such methods as

missionary societies and instrumental music or such doctrinal issues as the millennium or inerrancy. Churches, like individuals, may differ in their opinions and preferences. We can have churches that support the agencies and those that do not; churches that have Sunday schools and those that do not; churches that have instrumental music and those that do not. Some may be premillennial and other amillennial. All these things are opinions on which we may and will differ. So long as we "hold forth the head who is Christ" we are united in the one basic essential.

This does not mean that a church or an individual might not hold a destructive opinion or practice, and that others should not be concerned when this is the case. But still we accept each other on the ground of general loyalty to Jesus Christ, and we deal with error within an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

Finally, we do well to remember that we can all agree on what the Scriptures actually say. We differ and come up with varying opinions over what we think the Bible means by what it says. That Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you" is a fact of Scripture, a truth that all believers can accept. Just what our Lord meant when he said that is a matter of interpretation, an opinion. Leo Tolstoy wrote an entire book on that one statement of Jesus. He might have been right in his interpretation or he might have been wrong, or partly right and partly wrong. We might agree or disagree with Tolstoy's opinion, but we can all agree that our Lord did indeed say that the kingdom of God is within you. Facts or truths, therefore, are what the Bible actually says. Opinion is what we think it means by what it says. It is wrong for us to tyrannize people with what we think the Bible means by what it says, and thus form sects and factions.

So, Alexander Campbell was right when he said that believing an opinion never saved anybody, and disbelieving an opinion never damned anybody . We are saved by eternal truth, by a Person. The marvel of it is that when it comes to the great truths of the faith and to the fact of the Person of Christ we are more united than we are willing to admit.—*the Editor*

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J. W. McGarvey Redivivus. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (7)

In this installment of what the Church of Christ must do to be saved I am doing something different in that I am saying we would do well if we would become more like one of our honored pioneers, J. W. McGarvey. This gentle scholar and preacher, more than any of the pioneers, qualifies as "the Church of Christ pioneer." Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Walter Scott, and Raccoon John Smith are our pioneers only in a secondary sense, for in their day there was no "Church of Christ" as we know it today.

Back in the time of Campbell and Stone our folk (in the larger sense) wore three names: Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, and Church of Christ. They freely used all three names interchangeably. That alone distinguishes them from the tradition of Churches of Christ, for we are adamant about using that name only. Any congregation that uses any other name is suspect.

It was only when divisions took their toll in the Stone-Campbell movement that the three names took on sectarian meaning. Today those names point to three different denominations. The oldest and original branch has recently made its name official, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), though they still some-times use Church of Christ also. Then there is the unofficial, undenominational Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, who separated from the Disciples of Christ in recent decades, and are often referred to as Independent Christian Churches. They call themselves Christian Churches and Churches of Christ but not Disciples of Christ (not over their dead body!).

We, the Churches of Christ, are the only one of the three branches that uses that name exclusively. We seem to understand that we did not exist as a separate group back in the days of Campbell and Stone. Like the Independent Christian Church, we became a separate group by way of division, the first major split in the movement, which began to take form in the 1880's and was clearly manifest by 1906 when the U.S. Census listed us as a separate denomination.

So, if we select a "patriarch" (since we do not have patron saints!) or "our honored pioneer" for the Churches of Christ it would hardly be Campbell or Stone. I nominate J. W. McGarvey. In fact I am naming this installment "J. W. McGarvey Redivivus" in that we might be saved if we will resurrect the spirit of McGarvey and encourage our people to follow him as he followed Christ. If we have an alter ego among the pioneers it would be "Little Mac" as he was called and revered by his students at the College of the Bible in Lexington where he served as both professor and president for 40 years. And McGarvey takes us back to Campbell himself, for he studied at the feet of the reformer at Bethany

where he gave the Commencement address in Greek. In later years Campbell remembered McGarvey as one of his best and most gifted students.

McGarvey is our man for one special reason: He was adamantly opposed to instrumental music and vigorously fought against its introduction into the churches of his time. He was the first to argue that the instrument was a sin, and it was he who gave us our arguments against it, including the "argument from silence." He was always exact, logical, scholarly, and persuasive. He was a giant of a scholar, even if diminutive in stature, to have on our side. When he got through lambasting the instrument, there wasn't much left to say.

He opposed the instrument for decades, and the more he opposed it the more the churches adopted it. He at last quit arguing about it and writing about it, and when he was asked why, he conceded that it was hopeless. But he kept the instrument out of his home congregation, the old Broadway church in Lexington, where he served as both elder and preacher, for decades. It remained a cappella in deference to "Brother McGarvey," But the church did have, with Little Mac's approval, two pianos in the basement for Sunday School all those years. I'll concede that's not exactly "Church of Christ," but McGarvey is still our man. After all, he opposed the instrument "in worship"!

When the Broadway church in 1902 at last tired of placating McGarvey and brought in an organ, the old scholar betook himself to another Christian Church across town that elected to remain a cappella. It was a noble testimonial and very Church of Christ-like. He was at the time the most renowned "Campbellite" in Lexington, if not in all of Kentucky, which was a very Campbellite state, and there he was walking out of the mother church for conscience sake.

But being a famous Campbellite isn't all that McGarvey was at that time, for he had become one of the nation's outstanding conservative scholars, and from his desk at the College of the Bible and in the columns of the *Christian Standard* he had stormed the strongholds of modem biblical criticism as it emanated from Germany and the University of Chicago. He answered all the devious arguments of "the higher critics" with the same severity as he opposed instrumental music, sometimes caricaturing them as dishonest and reprehensible. As a teacher of preachers he stood for a strong Bible-centered curriculum. He urged his students to memorize large portions of the Bible, and it was rumored that he himself knew practically all the Bible by heart. He had no equal when it came to communicating the Bible in simple, vital English.

So, there is a reason why Church of Christ colleges have "J. W. McGarvey scholarships" and why he might be canonized as our special pioneer.

But there is one problem in all this: J. W. McGarvey never belonged to the “Church of Christ”! He remained what he had always been, a Disciple of Christ, a Christian only. The story behind this is all the more reason why I call for J. W. McGarvey Redivivus as one more way to save the Churches of Christ.

When we look at the time McGarvey lived, 1829-1911, we see that he lived in the eye of the storm of the controversy that led to the separation of Churches of Christ, formerly recognized in 1906. It is noteworthy that in spite of his opposition to the organ, he refused to make it a test of fellowship, and when the Churches of Christ finally separated over the organ question, he refused to go along. He believed that the Movement did not have to divide over such differences, that there could be “organ” churches and “non-organ” churches and still maintain fellowship. While he opposed the introduction of instruments, he refused to divide over it.

Even though he left his old home church when it brought in the organ, he did not break fellowship with that church. He still visited and would occasionally preach for them, and that is where his funeral was conducted. In short, McGarvey was not a sectarian or an exclusivist. If the Churches of Christ are to be saved, they must resurrect the spirit of McGarvey. Like him, they can be strong in their convictions, including being non-instrumental, without consigning to hell all those who believe and practice differently. Like McGarvey, the Churches of Christ must not make a capella singing a test of fellowship. Again, like McGarvey, we can even say that *for us* instrumental music would be a sin in that it would violate our conscience to use it in worship, but we must not make it a sin for others. We must allow for honest differences on such issues.

The non-divisive spirit of McGarvey is further seen in his relation to Daniel Sommer and David Lipscomb, the “founding fathers” of the Church of Christ, both Editor Bishops, the former in the North, the latter in the South. In 1889 Sommer advocated an “Address and Declaration” in Sand Creek, Illinois in which he withdrew fellowship from the “innovators” over such departures as instrumental music. The document stated that they would not longer consider such ones as brethren. This was the beginning of the separate Church of Christ in the North. Sommer wrote in his paper that the Church of Christ would soon be as separate from the Christian Church as the Christian Church is separate from the denominations, and he added, “”Hallelujah!”!”

Since McGarvey was a celebrated scholar and anti-organ, Sommer courted his support. But McGarvey would have nothing to do with Sommer, for while he opposed the organ he did not believe in being factious over it.

So, what I am saying is that the Churches of Christ followed the wrong pioneer. We followed Sommer into sectarianism and exclusivism when we should have followed McGarvey as he followed Christ, by disagreeing without dividing.

Prof. Robert Hooper of David Lipscomb University, a Church of Christ institution, in his book on David Lipscomb, provides a revealing insight into the relationship between McGarvey and Lipscomb. While Lipscomb was also opposed to the organ, his main concern in the South was the imposition of a missionary society upon the churches, which was as "Northern" as it was unscriptural. Hooper rightly points out that Lipscomb was disturbed that McGarvey, who opposed the organ and held to a strict interpretation of the Bible, was a "society man." How could McGarvey oppose the organ and support the missionary society?, Lipscomb lamented.

It is here that Hooper draws a revealing conclusion: "The one thing dividing them was McGarvey's acceptance of the missionary society and his willingness to fellowship those whom he (Lipscomb) considered to be in error." Whether intended or not, the Lipscomb scholar identified what has been the Achilles' heel of the Churches of Christ all these years: *a misunderstanding of the nature of fellowship.* McGarvey understood that fellowship does not imply endorsement, and that he could enjoy communion with those who were "in error" about some things. Lipscomb did not understand that, for he presumed that if the organ and societies were wrong you could not be in fellowship with those who practiced them. Lipscomb confused fellowship and approval; McGarvey did not.

It disturbed Lipscomb that McGarvey would fellowship "brothers in error," a bromide we have hung on ourselves all these years. McGarvey realized that those were the only ones he had to fellowship, for we are all in error about some things. That is precisely the point of Christian fellowship—that we accept each other as Christ has accepted us (Rom. 15:7), and that includes hang-ups, warts, and errors of all sorts. *As* Christ accepted us! Were we all free of error and right about everything when Christ in his love and mercy accepted us? How compelling! The Churches of Christ will never be saved until they come to see what Lipscomb could not see but what McGarvey did see.

The Lipscomb and Sommer mentality that we have to break fellowship when we differ on some "issue" like an organ or a society has been our undoing. That is why we not only broke fellowship with the Christian Church a century ago and became a separate church, but that is why we break fellowship with each other, spawning a new sect at the rate of one each decade in our 100 years of existence. We differ over the Sunday School and divide! We differ over communion cups and divide! We differ over church cooperation and divide! We differ over the millennium and divide! On and on it goes. We have been sold a bill of goods by Satan—and by some of our well-meaning forebears.

McGarvey is a flesh and blood example that we can look back to and up to, for in him we can see Christ's concern for unity. Study him as he ministered to a little church outside Lexington for 19 years. While they were well acquainted with his scruples about the organ, they eventually adopted it anyway. But they went right on accepting each other without a hitch. He preached for "organ" churches during most of his long ministry, and he insisted that they not defer to his scruples during his visit. This he did because he understood what the fellowship of the Spirit is about. It transcends differences over secondary matters.

Oh, yes, I might add that McGarvey was not only anti-organ and pro-society, but also anti-plurality of cups for the Lord's supper. He had his scruples, didn't he? But therein is the beauty of the brother. He bore his scruples in peace, though not in silence, in "the fellowship of the Spirit" and refused to divide the Body of Christ over such differences.

J. W. McGarvey Redivivus! If in matters of unity and fellowship the Churches of Christ will be more like McGarvey and less like Sommer and Lipscomb they might be saved from obscurantism, isolationism, sectarianism, and factionalism. They were all three anti-organ, but there was a big difference. In that difference lies our salvation.—*the Editor*

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THE CHURCH PRECEDED THE NEW TESTAMENT

That the church of Jesus Christ, created by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., was in existence and thriving long before the New Testament was written and gathered into a single volume is a fact of enormous significance. If we assume the thesis that we are to follow "the pattern" as set forth in the New Testament (NT) in setting up congregations in our time, we are left with the fact that this was not the case with the apostolic churches of the first century. They were not founded upon the order prescribed in the NT for the simple reason that the NT did not then exist.

We have difficulty accepting this fact, for it runs counter to the way we think about the church and the NT. Surely it was the NT that produced the church! Wrong. Just the opposite is the case: *It was the church that produced the NT!* Then the NT was not "the authority" of the earliest churches? Right. Then what was authoritative? The answer: Jesus Christ was their authority. This made the apostles and other inspired envoys authoritative in that they represented Jesus Christ. But in all of this there was no plan to write a book to serve as "the guide" for the church.

If we had been calling the shots, being as "Book" minded as we are, we would have had Jesus call his apostles together for the purpose of writing a book. Once the book was written our Lord would have said something like: "Go preach the gospel and baptize, and build churches on this book." Not only is there nothing like that in the Story, there is not even a hint that Jesus intended his disciples to author a book for the ongoing of his community. He pointed to the coming of the Holy Spirit and he promised that he would be with them always, but not a word about a collection of documents that we have come to call the NT.

Moreover, it appears that those who wrote what came to be the NT had not the slightest notion that they were contributing to a book. Paul never got together with other apostles and said something like: "We are not going to be around much longer, so we must get with it and produce a book that will serve as a guide for the church." The church already had "a guide," It was Jesus. It was a Baby that God gave to save the world, not a Book, not even an inspired one.

The documents that make up the NT were written incidentally, circumstantially, and extemporaneously, growing out of some particular need or situation. And except for Luke-Acts there was no idea that one book (letter) would ever be associated with another. Mark, who probably wrote the first gospel account, never dreamed that his handiwork would one day be part of a Matthew-Mark-Luke-John arrangement in a book. Paul had no idea that he was writing *First* Thessalonians or *Second* Timothy. He was simply writing a letter to one of his young churches about their problems and yet another letter to a young evangelist. Except for certain problems that came up he might never have written either of them. There would never have been any correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians except that he received a letter from them that raised certain questions. He certainly had no idea that he was writing part of the NT.

The church was something like 50 years old before Paul's letters, which was the first partial collection, were gathered and circulated. It was well into the fourth century before the NT as we know it today was recognized as such. So, it is a reality to be dealt with, particularly in our search for an appropriate hermeneutics, that the earliest Churches of Christ did not have the book that we look to as authoritative.

This does not mean that inspired, authoritative documents were not in the mind of God all along. To human eyes it might appear that the letters in the NT were a happenstance of history. But the church has always believed, as we now believe, that God was at work in history and it was because of His providence that we have the NT. Neither does it take anything away from the significance of the NT to recognize that it was produced by the church rather than the other way around.

But the fact remains that the apostolic churches, which we look to in one way or another as prototypes, did not have the NT as their pattern. They had Scripture in the form of the Old Testament, and this was significant. They had the preaching and direction of the apostles and their associates. They had the leading of the Holy Spirit, which was the presence of Christ. They had a growing oral tradition about Jesus Christ, his deeds and his teaching.

The center of it all was Jesus. Their confession was "Jesus is Lord," and they made this confession unto death itself. Anything was authoritative to them as it pointed to and magnified Jesus Christ. They looked to the Old Testament in terms of what it revealed about Christ. The apostles proclaimed Christ. They gathered, preserved, and memorized every morsel of information about Christ. When the NT eventually began to emerge, a document here and a letter there, it was inspired and authoritative as it reflected the spirit of Christ.

Add to all this another remarkable fact, which is that even when the NT finally appeared it never claimed to be the guide, pattern, or authority for the church down through the ages, and we have cause to rethink our way of viewing the NT. "All authority has been given unto me," Jesus told his church, and that authority has never been vouchsafed to any man, group of men, or to any book. Jesus Christ is our authority, first, last, and always!

And that is the way we should view the NT—as authoritative insofar as it reveals to us the spirit of Christ. This is why Romans means more to us than James, in that it lays bare the grace of God that is greater than all our sins. It is why I John is more "authoritative" than Jude in that it tells us that "He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world." That is why a single passage, such as "If God is for us, who can be against us?," means far more than scores of other verses combined. The NT is thus authoritative as it brings us into closer fellowship with God and with His Son Christ Jesus.

This is why the primitive churches did not have to have the NT. They had Jesus Christ.

These facts, once acknowledged, not only liberate us from an impossible patternistic hermeneutics, but they also allow for adjustments to be made in what the church believes and practices down through the centuries. Because of changing cultural conditions the church may say "We don't believe or practice that anymore." If it was once a rule that women should cover their heads in the assembly, it doesn't follow that it must always be so. If women were once to be silent in the assemblies, it might not hold true in different cultures centuries later. If only men served as evangelists and elders early on, the church might change this in cultures where women serve as monarchs, governors, and judges. If

back then the church functioned without societies and agencies of any kind, the centuries might make a difference. If then they used crude means of communication, today we might use Tel star!

But what really matters—Jesus Christ and the gospel—never changes. And those things in Scripture that clearly reflect the spirit of Christ, so that the church can say, "This is Christ speaking for all time," must always abide.

You will notice that I have made the church not only the producer of the NT but the interpreter as well. There is no way to avoid this. Only the church can decide what the NT is saying to the church. But it is not an infallible interpretation. We must keep on, generation after generation, interpreting the Bible, more and more responsibly. That is why it matters what Luther thought, what Calvin thought, what Campbell thought, what our parents thought. We take the torch of Biblical study from them and bear it for our own generation, shaking it as we go, believing that the more we shake the torch the brighter it bums.

And it is always Jesus Christ to whom we look as we look at Scripture. Just as he is God's own interpreter, it is his Spirit that rules over the Bible.—*the Editor*

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RESPONSES TO "WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO? ..."

You might be interested in reading some of the responses we have received to our series on what the Church of Christ must do to be saved, all of which thus far have been positive. We invite responses, negative or positive. Tell us what you think. Since this series will continue as long as the paper itself, which is December 1992, there is yet much that will be said on this subject. We will occasionally publish responses, so let us hear from you. We will withhold your name if you request it, but we are finding that more and more people are ready to stand up and be counted on the side of renewal.

> We have really enjoyed your articles on "What Must the Church of Christ Do to be Saved?" It has needed to be said for a long time, and praise the Lord someone finally said it. We hope many changes will take place because of it. Continue to work toward that end.—*Ken and Ramona Brown. Paradise. Ca.*

I just read part 3 of "What Must the Church of Christ Must Do . . ." Great! Just the thing I have been saying for ten years. I am pretty well an outcast from the Churches of Christ because I believe there are other Christians outside the "Church of Christ" denomination, so I am just an independent now. Keep up the good work.—*Ed Stevens. Bedford. Pa.*

You hit the nail on the head! You took the words right out of my heart. I was raised a Presbyterian and was baptized two years after I married Jeff, who was raised in the Church of Christ. I was attracted to the church for several reasons. Beside the obvious one, there was a knowledge of the Word and who Jesus is—something I wasn't exposed to growing up. In the last 16 years we've lived in Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas, Scotland and back to Texas. I've seen it all, and over time it has been increasingly difficult to offer the Church of Christ to someone. Jesus, yes, but not the church as it is. Jeff even spent ten years in the ministry. He's in grad school getting his Ph.D. and is going to ACU to teach. He's decided the hope for the future is in our classrooms. And as an elder who can make changes, not as a preacher who will get fired. We're excited about what you've introduced to the brotherhood. We'd like to be part of the change. You have my permission to use my letter and my name. I welcome the opportunity, especially as a woman, to speak out loudly on this issue.—*Gail Hamm. Lubbock. Tx.*

You are absolutely correct on what the Church of Christ needs to do to be saved. Our brethren are among the finest people in the world, and it is a shame so many people are turned off to us because of our divisions, and our position on instrumental music, divorce and remarriage, and other such issues. I pray God that He will continue to use Christians like you to enlighten our hearts and minds to the real truth, that we can be Christians only without being the only Christians. The call for repentance has never been stronger.—*David Brown. Florence. Al.*

In our third installment of the series (March 1991) we called for a "Proclamation of Repentance" to be read in our churches and circulate as a petition among the churches. If people were free to sign, I ventured that thousands would sign. The proclamation would be a confession that we have sinned against God and against our own heritage by being such a divisive people, and it included a resolution that we would once more become a unity people. We got a number of responses, some from ministers, one saying, "I know five preachers that will sign it." One lady wrote that she would sign it but that the Church of Christ she attends would frown on the idea. This one-liner from a woman in New Mexico represents the way a lot of readers feel.

As for “Can the Church of Christ be saved?”—or what we must do? -right on, Leroy! I’ll sign the proclamation.—*Mrs. Virginia Adams. Las Cruces. NM*

Let us hear from you. Go ahead, put it in writing, even if only for our eyes. Tell us what you think we must do to be saved, or if you think we are OK as is, tell us why you think so.—*the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Ouida spent the summer caring for her mother, entertaining visitors, mailing books, keeping house, and, most significantly, welcoming a great nephew into the world, born July 30 here in Denton to Ouida’s niece who is more like a daughter (also a nurse who has helped us with Mother Pitts all these years, who, now that she has her baby and her husband his Ph. D. degree, will be moving away, a sad time for us). I did some traveling, including a trip to the Gulf of Mexico with grandson Ashley for deep sea fishing (his idea more than mine!), and got some work done on revising my *The Stone-Campbell Movement,* which is presently out of print.

Albania has been described as the world’s first totally atheistic state. Every church and mosque in the country was either destroyed or turned into a government facility. Those who succeeded in smuggling Bibles into other communist countries found Albania almost impossible. That is why one of our missionaries in Eastern Europe, Bill Smith, calls it a miracle that he is now able to enter this country and conduct a major evangelistic campaign sanctioned and assisted by the Albanian government. In a recent letter Bill refers to all the prayers that went up to God in behalf of that country, and concludes with: “Those prayers have lifted a layer of darkness over this very isolated nation of 2.6 million on the Adriatic Sea.”

Around the world 3,500 new congregations of believers are being organized every week. In Africa alone there are 20,000 new Christians every day. Africa is now considered to be 40% Christian, compared to only 3% in 1900. In China it is estimated that believers grow at a rate of 28,000 daily. The world over believers are added at the rate of 70,000 a day, but still we fall behind the population growth.

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre recently died at age 85, leaving behind the first schism in the Roman Catholic Church since 1870 that numbers 10,000 followers and 300 priests. He was excommunicated in 1988 for consecrating four bishops to help carry on his battle to return the Latin mass and other traditions rejected by Vatican reformers.

During the summer the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sponsored a school of evangelism in Moscow for 4,902 pastors and evangelists who came from all over Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, many of them from small, struggling, persecuted churches. The purpose was to learn how to spread the Christian message more effectively. Many of them were very poor. They paid their own way to the school, but once there they were housed and fed by the Billy Graham team on the campus of the Moscow State University. It was the first such training program in Soviet history. While the Russian Orthodox Church did not officially participate, a number of their people at-tended. Billy Graham told the preachers from every denomination in that part of the world that now is the time to do God's work. He said the school was taking advantage of the new openness that has come to Eastern Europe.

You already have or soon will be a recipient of the brochure "One Nation Under God," which is being mailed to every home in America, 102 million, which is the largest single non-government mailing in the history of the postal service. This ambitious project, which is likely to cost $10 million, is sponsored by the Sycamore Church of Christ in Cookeville, Tn., with thousands of congregations assisting. By mid-summer there had already been 80,000 responses to the mailing. The brochure is an eight-page, full-color, cartoon-like presentation on Jesus Christ as the answer to the ills of modem society. It is nothing less than amazing that our people can do a project of this magnitude without any centralized government.

Mainline churches have a way of shooting themselves in the foot over the issue of homosexuality. First it was the Presbyterians who brought the recommendation for a new sexual ethic, which included approval of same-gender sex, all the way to the General Assembly for a vote. While it was overwhelmingly voted down, it left the denomination bruised and battered by the ordeal. Now it is the Disciples of Christ in the throes of controversy over the issue, sparked by the fact that their nominee for the new general minister has acknowledged membership in and approval of GLAD, a gay-lesbian support organization among the Disciples. Like the Presbyterian study committee that called for a new sexual ethic, Dr. Michael Kinnamon, the nominee to be the next general minister, believes that since gays-lesbians do not choose their sexual orientation, the church can accept homosexuality as God-approved. *The Disciple,* an official publication for the denomination, is to be commended for publishing essays on both sides of the issue. But it is evident that the church catholic is not going to accept the thesis that same-gender sex is

according to the will of God, and churches are making a mistake when they press the issue. It is one thing to show love and acceptance toward homosexuals, which we should all support, but it is another thing to say that homosexual behavior is ordained of God. Neither is the church at large going to be indifferent to what it has always understood the Bible to teach on the subject. But injured feet or not, both the Disciples and the Presbyterians are going to be OK, and we wish for them an effective ministry for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

Toward December 1992

We regret that Restoration Review is coming to a close much sooner than we like. What a delight to find it each month in our mail box. Like a good friend it will be greatly missed when gone.—*Homer Matson, Jefferson, Or.*

We are grateful for the work that you have done and the blessings it has brought to so many people.—*George and Betty Montgomery, Wood River, FL.*

Your paper has helped to truly set me free and has brought me into a closer walk with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—*Chuck Weinsheimer, Doylestown, Oh.*

Thanks for the many years of thoughtful writing. I am excited to see many of our mainline Church of Christ leaders quoting (albeit no names mentioned) you and Carl Ketcherside and moving in a new direction.—*E. LaRue Bennett, Indianapolis, In.*

I know that everyone should get to retire and not have to work so hard, but you will certainly be missed. Who will pick up the banner? What will we do without hearing from you?—Barbara J. Fudge, Ft. Walton, Fl.

It would be great if you could find someone remotely, at least, like yourself, who could carry forward the tradition of this irreplaceable ministry of journalism. There simply will be no way for all of us who have been in your debt adequately to measure the impact of your thinking across the Reformation tradition.—*Roger N. Carstensen, president, Institute for Biblical Literacy, Athens, Ga.*

We are delighted with the autobiography of Carl Ketcherside. Right now I'm reading about the break-up in the family of Daniel Sommer, a man highly esteemed by my parents and often in our home. His paper was our paper while the Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation, never. It is all interesting to me but sad.—*Mrs. Arthur Voyer, Paden City, WV*

I have received some negative response to my last article in *Restoration Review* (May 1991 issue). Several preachers visited with me and wrote to me and about me. However, most people have been very positive and in agreement.—*Doug Hale, Lubbock, Tx.*

(I was pleased to report to Doug that his article had such an impact on one man that he read it in its entirety publicly at the North American Christian Convention in July in Denver—*Ed*.)

We had a wonderful time visiting the old cathedrals in England, that, sadly, are more the testimony of the past than evidence of a vital religion today. Weren't able to see Stott's church in London, but did see Swift's church in Dublin, Anselm's in Chester, Donne's in London, and John Knox's old church (St. Giles) in Edinburgh. All of this made me appreciate even more the vitality of our little Quaker Ave. Church of Christ in Lubbock and the good things going on among us today.—*Tom Langford, Lubbock, Tx.*

(The Quaker Ave. church that Tom refers to is one of our non-Sunday School congregations. One of God's surprises has been the interest that these churches have taken in unity and renewal among our people. It may prove to be the case that our "right wing" will do more to save us than anyone else.—*Ed*.)

Alexander Campbell's way of describing the relation of "grace given and grace appropriated" was to say, first, there are no conditions for the procurement of grace, but, second, there are conditions for the enjoyment of grace. He provided some powerful analogies to support this view.—*Bill Richardson, Turner, Or.*

Yes, the church of today must rethink its position and make some changes toward a Christ-centered and Biblically-directed life.—*Homer Hailey, Tucson, AZ.*

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BOOK NOTES

We have sent *Pilgrimage of Joy*, the autobiography of Carl Ketcherside, to all those who reserved a copy. Already we have heard from a number who are delighted to read about Carl's interesting and colorful life. We will send you a copy at $15.00 postpaid when you send a check with your order.

Back issues of this journal, loose copies, are available while they last at 40 cents each plus postage, or we will send you a random selection of 15 of them for $5.00, postpaid. Some go back 20 years and more. We also have bound volumes, seven in all, dating back to 1977, except for 1979-80, covering 12 years of publication, $70 postpaid for all seven. Or you may purchase them one by one, such as *The Hope of the Believer* (1989-90) at $15.00 postpaid.

You will find *Mary For All Christians* by John Madquarrie, a British writer, both informative and provocative, and you may find yourself drawn closer to the tradition that gives special honor to the mother of our Lord. Along the way he discusses such doctrines as the immaculate conception and the glorious assumption. $14.50 postpaid.

How would you like to read what 27 women from many denominations say about the ministry of women in the church? A new book, *Women and Church*, includes essays by a black-African Roman Catholic, an Anglican, a Baptist pastor, an Orthodox minister, a Pentecostal professor, etc., which shows that it relates the potential of women's ministry to the challenge of ecumenicity. $12.50 postpaid.

The ACU Press in Abilene, Tx. is to be commended for issuing books that call for Biblical renewal and challenge Churches of Christ to reexamine their heritage. We stock three such titles: *The Worldly Church*, $10.00; *Discovering Our Roots*, $12.00; *The Cruciform Church*, $19.00. Prices include postage. These books are all out on the cutting edge.

Call Me Blessed by Faith Martin continues to be the most popular study on the ministry of women, persuasively presented. $10.50 postpaid.

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